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Re: Keeping the Ken Norris Rancho Marino MPA in Cambria, as part of the F&G Department's preferred alternative for a network of MPAs in the Central Coast Study Region.

Dear John Ugoretz, 30 May 2006

I am writing to encourage you to keep the Ken Norris Rancho Marino MPA in Cambria, as part of the F&G Department's preferred alternative for a network of MPAs in the Central Coast Study Region. As you know it is already in the preferred alternative forwarded by the BRTF to the Fish and Game Commission.

As a Research Specialist, and user of the Ken Norris Rancho Marino Reserve I can see the benefit of including it in the network of MPAs in the Central Coast Study Region. Our research group has been conducting ongoing intertidal and nearshore monitoring at this diverse site since the UC system began managing it in 2001. The on site facilities available to researchers make it an excellent place to stay while sampling Rancho Marino and our adjacent sites between San Simeon and San Luis Obispo.

In addition, to establishing long term monitoring plots of two ecologically important species (black abalone and owl limpets) our research group has also conducted biodiversity surveys, at Rancho Marino. As you know, the black abalone (*Haliotis cracherodii*) has experienced mass mortalities along the coast of California since the mid-1980s and is now a candidate for protection under the USA Endangered Species Act. Mortality is due to infection by a pathogen that leads to a fatal wasting disease called "withering syndrome" (WS). Working with MARINe (Multi-Agency Rocky Intertidal Network) and PISCO (Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans) monitoring groups we have documented the northward progression of WS along the California coast. Abalone populations are now sampled at 23 sites (including Rancho Marino) from Point Conception to Bodega Bay. We sample our plots 2 times annually (spring and fall). Currently, the last extant large and healthy populations exist in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS). However, recent declines in the southern portion of the Sanctuary were cause for concern, but whether these declines are due to WS remains to be seen. Recovery of black abalone populations to pre-withering syndrome levels is unlikely as recruitment is thought to be localized and the remaining individuals at these sites are probably too far apart to allow for successful spawning. This idea is substantiated by the lack of juvenile black abalone at all sites that have experienced "withering syndrome" induced declines. Black abalone recruitment and survival may be further limited by habitat changes that occur after the animals disappear from an area. We've noticed that after "withering syndrome" comes through- cracks become filled with encrusting invertebrates. Additionally, seastars also seem to increase. These opportunistic scavengers are likely eating abalone weakened by W.S. (personal observation). Urchins also increase. The change in habitat may affect recruitment and survival and thus, hinder black abalone recovery. Further protection of these delicate resources and continued monitoring are essential to the effective

management decisions. The population and community consequences of the loss of this important species can not be assessed without a spatially expansive long-term monitoring program.

For more information see: Partnership for the Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO) http://www.piscoweb.org and the Multi-Agency Rocky Intertidal Network (MARINe) http://www.marine.gov (you will find a link to our 10 year monitoring report, which includes some data from Rancho Marino).

Below is some rationale for the Ken Norris Rancho Marino MPA:

1) The MLPA Goal 3 for research and education and the socio-economic benefits of establishing the Ken Norris Rancho Marino Reserve are significant. Our ongoing intertidal monitoring project is conducted here and at adjacent sites with differing levels of protection, allowing unique and important opportunities for evaluating the effects of different MPA types (SMP, SMR, vs. no MPA protection). This type of collaboration is essential for the department to effectively monitor and evaluate MPAs. We are only one of 15 ongoing University research projects using the marine areas adjacent to the reserve. On a socio-economic level the cumulative costs of running our monitoring project s annually is between $300,000 and $500,000.

The UC facilities on the reserve facilitate our research and provide education about MPAs in the area. Linking a terrestrial and marine reserve provides unique opportunities for education and research. Our group is just one of many university groups that use the reserve's intertidal and adjacent waters.

It has also been beneficial for us to have a site with enforcement. The reserve manager, Don Canestro, caught poachers with bags of Lottia and black abalone and we don't always have the first hand knowledge of such events at our sites. Don was able to alert Fish and Game wardens and return the animals to the intertidal. Don's presence on the reserve will continue to provide enforcement assistance.

2) Rancho Marino is an ecologically important and diverse area. Our surveys have found more than 100 intertidal invertebrate and algal species. It is also a marine mammal haulout for sealions (up to 100), harbor seals (pupping area and up to 55 adults). Sea otters are abundant. Off shore there is a unique mix of Nereocystis/Macrocystis kelp beds. This area is part of one of the largest contiguous kelp beds (Estero Pt to San Simeon Pt and beyond) in the state.

In summary I hope the department optimizes the socio-economic benefits of keeping the Ken Norris Rancho Marino Reserve as part of their preferred network of MPAs in the Central Coast. The positive benefits of this MPA for public education (important political support for F&G) and research (critical for the F&G decision making) far outweigh any potential short term negative impacts to fishermen. The vast majority of the Central Coast Study Region would remain open for fishing.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Christy (Roe) Bell, Research Specialist
University of California, Santa Cruz

CC: L. Ryan Broderick, Mike Crisman, Member of the F&G Commission, Blue Ribbon Task Force*